

# 10 tips for being A GREAT DAD



As a father, it's vital that you understand how much your consistent presence and stable, nurturing involvement in your children's lives bolsters all aspects of their development and their ability to flourish and excel in life. That's an invaluable gift that not all children receive. Check out these 10 suggestions for how you can be the great dad your children want, need, and deserve. For additional tips and information, see [www.fatherhood.gov/for-dads](http://www.fatherhood.gov/for-dads).



## 1 BE PRESENT AND ENGAGED. *Your kids want and need lots of your time and attention.*

- Just being there is the best gift you can give them.
- Take them with you on a quick visit to the store, throw a ball in the back yard, read them a bedtime story.
- If you can't see them in person, stay connected through phone calls, texts, emails, and video chats. Send morning and bedtime text messages with a meme, selfie, or dad joke to strengthen your bond with them.

## 2 BE SUPPORTIVE. *Provide for your family emotionally, financially, and in practical ways.*

- Contribute financially and work with your coparent to maintain a financially sound household.
- Nurture and guide your children, and comfort them when they are upset.
- Be a hands-on dad by doing household chores and teaching your kids how they can pitch in too (e.g., 2- to 3-year-olds can put their toys away, 4- to 5-year-olds can feed the cat, 6- to 7-year-olds can water plants). Refer to [www.familyroi.org/docs/FamilyROI\\_Age\\_Appropriate\\_Chores.pdf](http://www.familyroi.org/docs/FamilyROI_Age_Appropriate_Chores.pdf) for additional examples of age-appropriate chores.

## 3 LISTEN AND EMPATHIZE. *When your children talk to you, pay attention.*

- Make eye contact and show them you are listening.
- Demonstrate empathy and make sure you understand what they're saying. This will help them feel seen, heard, and valued by you.
- Don't look at or spend time on your smartphone when they need your attention.

## 4 BE PATIENT AND GENTLE. *Stay calm when your kids make mistakes or misbehave.*

- Avoid spanking as that can teach them it's OK to hit if they're angry.
- Use age-appropriate consequences to encourage better choices. Refer to [www.KidsHealth.org/en/parents/discipline.html](http://www.KidsHealth.org/en/parents/discipline.html) for additional examples.
- Praise and reward good behavior. For example, let them know you are proud of them for sharing their toys.



## 5 BE A POSITIVE ROLE MODEL. *Your kids learn by watching and listening to you!*

- Treat others with kindness, compassion, and respect.
- Follow your own rules. For example, don't tell your kids to be kind to others and then shout at the driver who cuts in front of you.
- No parent is perfect—we all make mistakes sometimes. Teach your children humility by admitting when you make a mistake and working to improve your shortcomings.

## 6 FOSTER AUTONOMY. *Give your children room to grow and be independent.*

- Give them structured, age-appropriate choices (e.g., ask an 18-month-old “Do you want to wear your blue shirt or your red shirt today?”).
- Provide love and respect, and show confidence in their capabilities.
- Provide guidance and then encourage them to explore the world beyond the safety net you provide.

## 7 BE A TEACHER AND A PLAYMATE. *Help your kids learn at school and through play.*

- Help them with homework, attend teacher-parent meetings, and guide them as they explore the world.
- Remember that play is an important part of child development and encourage them to choose activities they enjoy.
- Engage with them in rough and tumble play, and help them learn to regulate, understand, and manage their emotions.

## 8 BE LOVING AND AFFECTIONATE. *Help your children feel safe and loved.*

- Hold and kiss your newborn to promote attachment, trust, and overall health.
- Continue to give them lots of love and affection as they grow older to help them feel secure and connected to you.
- Encourage your teenager to confide in you. If you are nonjudgmental, they will be more likely to share information.

*To show respect for children's autonomy and boundaries, parents and other adults should always ask for their permission before showing physical affection.*

## 9 WORK WITH YOUR COPARENT COOPERATIVELY. *Show your children how to be respectful.*

- Share decision making, be willing to compromise, and never undermine your coparent.
- If you and your coparent are in a romantic relationship, make time to nurture your love (e.g., set a regular date night).
- If you are no longer with your child's mother, try to maintain a respectful relationship and avoid exposing your children to conflict or drama.

## 10 PRIORITIZE SELF-CARE. *Your children need your love and support for years to come.*

- Eat a healthy diet, exercise, and get 7 to 8 hours of sleep a night.
- Schedule annual well-doctor visits and address physical and mental health challenges as they arise.
- Participate regularly in activities that help you recharge when you feel stressed, overwhelmed, or burned out.



**THE BOTTOM LINE:** *Be a good role model, show up, try your best. Then you're doing the most important things you can to be a great dad!*